

Coe College Political Activity Policy

Coe College is dedicated to providing students with an educational environment that will foster those habits of mind and action that are vital to engaged citizens in a democratic society. This is the goal of a liberal education, a goal that cannot be met without maintaining free and open inquiry within our college community. As an academic community we also seek to have our engagement in political expression be of a civil and thoughtful form.

As a tax exempt entity, Coe College is prohibited by federal law from participating in or attempting to influence campaigns for any elective office or ballot proposal. The following policy attempts to balance these competing considerations of free expression, civility, and federal election law while providing members of the college community, its faculty, staff, and students with guidance in conforming their political activity to these considerations.

Section I. Guiding Principles of Coe College Political Activity Policy:

- Coe College has a longstanding tradition of encouraging civic engagement of all forms by the members of the college community. Such political activity is encouraged as long as it is consistent with existing college policies and with law.
- Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to exercise their rights as individual citizens to participate in the political process.
- In order to maintain the College's nonpartisan and independent status and to ensure compliance under section 501(c)(3) of IRS code and with the Federal Election Campaign Act, the college itself cannot participate in political campaigns.

Section II. Faculty and Staff

- College employees are free to express their political opinions in the workplace, but they should be clear, especially when interacting with students, that these are their personal views and that they are not speaking for the college.
- College employees are also encouraged to take part in partisan political activities, but should do so apart from their regular work and responsibilities at the college and should seek to avoid the appearance that they are representing the college when engaged in such activities. Resources connected to their employment (e.g. office letterhead, college e-mail account, college email distribution lists, office phone, etc.) are also not to be used to engage in partisan political activity.
- If faculty have participation in a political activity as part of a class-related activity, they should make the learning goals of the activity clear to the students and make sure students know they are not being asked to endorse a particular political message or candidate.
- Academic freedom is vital to the teaching and learning environment of Coe College. The protections of academic freedom extend to faculty and to any teaching-related activities of staff. As a guide regarding the rights of academic freedom, Coe College uses the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP's) statement. (See Appendix below.)
- Members of the faculty and staff are encouraged to be reflective and intentional about when and how they choose to share their personal political opinions with students. In the pursuit of cultivating a marketplace of thoughtful political views, faculty and staff should be mindful of the ways in which someone in their role may convey political bias unintentionally.
- Faculty and staff may use their titles and institutional affiliation in political correspondence and petitions for the purposes of identification, but should avoid creating the impression that they are speaking or acting on behalf of the college. (See Appendix below.)
- The college may, through the President, the Board of Trustees, or those designated on their behalf, choose to express itself on an issue or contemporary event when the expression of opinions on the issue is in line with an effort to further the college's mission (e.g. lobbying for expanded financial aid, letter to the editor about the value of the Fulbright political program, etc.).

Section III. Students and Student Organizations

- Participation in political activity by Coe students fulfills an important educational objective. Students are accordingly encouraged to engage with and express political views, including those of a partisan nature.
- Students have academic freedom within the academic program, that is, they are free to express views and to research topics that are immediately relevant to course topics and activities, and that meet the academic standards for that course, without censorship or penalty.
- Students are to be respectful of other members of the Coe College community and their views. The Campus Civility Statement applies at all times while one is a registered student at Coe, including activities off-campus. (www.coe.edu/campuslife/referencebook_policies)
- Students should not use college resources in such a way that would imply endorsement of particular partisan positions by the college (e.g. using college letterhead, or Coe social media accounts to promote political causes). The use of individual student e-mail accounts in communicating partisan views does not by itself imply a college endorsement of those views.
- Student groups, including clubs and organizations, have the right to sponsor speakers, movies, political events, etc. that espouse diverse political views and may advertise such events using official group e-mail accounts. (Student groups who wish to sponsor speakers and campaign-related events must abide by the policies outlined in “Use of College Facilities and Resources”.)

Section IV: Institutional Campaign-related Activities

The American Council on Education (ACE) has issued guidelines regarding political campaign-related activities on college and university campuses in order to protect the tax-exempt status of educational institutions and to serve compliance with the Federal Election Campaign Act. Members of the Coe community should follow the ACE guidelines when engaging in activities on campus relating to political campaigns or candidates. The full ACE memorandum covers a wide range of activities, and the guidelines that follow are not meant to be exhaustive, but to emphasize some specific expectations for members of the Coe community.

- Colleges are permitted to conduct **voter education activities**, including publishing voter guides and conducting training programs, as long as they are carried out in a nonpartisan manner. (All student initiated voter education activities and locations must be approved by the Director of Campus Life who may consult the Dean of Students and Secretary of the College in order to determine the appropriateness of the activity.)
- **Voter registration activities** are permitted, even when aimed at groups (such as urban voters, young people, or minorities) likely to favor a certain political candidate or party, provided that the activities are not intended to target voters only of a particular party or to help particular candidates.
- **Candidate appearances.** If the institution chooses to invite candidates to speak individually in their capacity as a candidate, it must take steps to ensure that all such legally-qualified candidates are invited and that none is favored in relation to the activity. An explicit statement should be made as part of the introduction of the speaker and in communications concerning the speaker’s attendance that the institution does not support or oppose the candidate. In addition, campaign fundraising at such events is prohibited. (Student groups wishing to sponsor candidates or other partisan speakers must abide by the policies outlined in “Use of College Facilities and Resources”.)
- **A candidate may be invited to appear in a non-candidate capacity**, provided that the individual is chosen to speak solely for reasons other than his or her candidacy, the individual speaks only in his or her non-candidate capacity, no reference to the election is made, and the organization maintains a nonpartisan atmosphere on the premises or at the event.

Appendix: Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject. Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.